

VII. RECOMMENDATIONS FOR OFFICE OF HISTORY AND ARCHAEOLOGY'S RESPONSIBILITIES ON MANAGING CULTURAL RESOURCES ON DENALI HIGHWAY LANDS

OHA's management goals for the Denali Highway lands include protecting the resource by continued trail and site monitoring, consultation and coordination with State, Federal and other agencies, mitigation of sites, increasing management information through archaeological survey and landscape history, and improving public outreach and public access on the lands of the Denali Highway.

Managing Cultural Resources on Denali Highway Lands

Monitoring Sites and Trails

A primary responsibility for OHA is continued monitoring for impacts to the cultural resources on Denali Highway lands, and to minimize these impacts. This requires regular checking of trails and cultural sites, especially those located near areas of intense public use.

A trails management plan should be established by DNR/DMLW. OHA should work with DMLW on trails management, enabling DNR to serve the public need for more access while protecting the cultural resources of the region. The plan should specifically address the OHV trails in the TLAD. The TLAD is an Archaeological District listed on the National Register of Historic Places, and will be largely administered by the State after final land transfers are complete in 2009. Trails management will require collaboration on a number of trail-related activities, including monitoring trails in the TLAD, management of trail improvements, archaeological clearance of unsurveyed RS2477 trails, possible closure of unauthorized trails, and development of new trails.

Archaeological sites in the Denali Highway region typically are shallowly buried, and human use causes periodic exposure of cultural resources. This is especially true in the TLAD.

A variety of trail improvement and site mitigation measures are now practiced within the state. An evaluation of these measures should be undertaken with DMLW to utilize the most appropriate techniques for the TLAD and Denali Highway lands. A high priority for OHA will be to work with DNR/DMLW on the improvement of the Glacier Gap Trail. Trail improvements on Glacier Gap may include the rerouting of trails and trail hardening methods. The proposed Alternatives 2 and 3 called for trail rerouting (see Figure 9) requiring an archaeological survey, which was performed in 2005.

Archaeological surveys should be conducted on the RS2477 trails on state lands along the Denali Highway not already surveyed. This includes the Windy Creek Trail and the section of the Valdez Creek Trail that lies between Roosevelt Lake and the eastern boundary of Denali Block II, as well as any trails in the future that are deemed RS2477 eligible.

The "Landmark Gap Creek Trail" leaves a gravel pit at Mile 22.2 in the BLM Delta River Wild and Scenic River Corridor, and extends north into the Denali Block. This trail should be closed to OHV use as it traverses several archaeological sites. Extension of the trail may impact additional sites. Converting the trail to a walking trail is an option, with a possible extension connecting it with the esker-top trail west of the

Round Tangle Lake campground. When evaluating this option, consideration must be given to the possible effects foot traffic and artifact collecting may have on the surface sites in the region. Collaboration between DNR and BLM will be necessary on trails in the areas adjacent to the Federal Delta and Gulkana Wild and Scenic River Corridors.

Newly pioneered trails may require closure to OHV traffic. The “Mile 23.5 Trail”, located at approximately Mile 23.5 of the Denali Highway, was of concern because continued pioneering of the trail could extend it into an area where it impacts cultural sites. This trail was closed in 2005.

Monitoring needs to continue on the ice patches and cirque glaciers that continue to melt. Cultural material melting out of this ice is relatively fragile and short-lived, and must be recovered soon after exposure. Time is critical, as many of the ice patches are almost completely melted.

Inter- and Intra-agency, Tribal, and Commercial Coordination and Consultation

The primary concern of OHA is protection of cultural resources on State of Alaska lands. OHA consults with state and federal agencies, commercial interests, and others to assess the effects of actions on the cultural resources of a project area, as well as minimizing and mitigating of the potential impacts of these projects. OHA will continue providing interested parties seeking permits, leases, or advice with information and recommendations for best management of the cultural resources on Denali Highway lands.

Effective management of the cultural resources along the Denali Highway requires the coordination of all landowning and regulatory agencies in the region, including Ahtna Incorporated, DNR/DMLW and BLM. Coordination with DNR/DMLW on trails development has been noted above. Coordination with Ahtna Inc. and regional non-profit Native groups will facilitate the dialogue that OHA has started with regional groups concerned with the cultural resources on Denali Highway lands.

The 1980 MOA between BLM and OHA requires updating to correct wording and resolve differences in state and federal application of the OHV restrictions.

Several joint projects could be conducted with BLM that would benefit management of the cultural resources of the region. These include a joint survey of the Amphitheater Mountains along the Denali Block/BLM Wild and Scenic River Corridor boundary for additional argillite lithic sources; monitoring and testing of sites around the Delta River Falls, which may contain a 10,000 year record of use as a portage; GIS modeling of Greater Tangle Lake, recreating prehistoric landscape use and creating public interpretation panels and other products; and dating of regional bluff and lake deposits, in an effort to ascertain the date for the draining of the massive Glacial Lake Ahtna.

Mitigation

Cultural sites that are in danger of destruction through either human or natural disturbance factors should be protected, if practicable, from these impacts. If it is not practicable to protect a site through avoidance, protective coverings, trail re-routing, or other non-obtrusive means, then the site should be mitigated through data recovery, where an effort is made to recover the cultural information present in the site.

A site in need of mitigation in the TLAD/SUA is XMH-403, which has been adversely impacted by stream erosion and foot and vehicle traffic. This site contains cultural material eroding out of a stream bank. Archaeological excavations should be conducted on the eroding bank, with a surface treatment applied to the stream bank to eliminate further erosion.

Archaeological Survey and Landscape History

Efforts should continue on the location and GPS documentation of known sites in the TLAD, especially of sites in the lower Landmark Gap Lake region.

Areas on state land throughout the Denali Highway region with a high probability for containing sites should be archaeologically surveyed, allowing appropriate management and protection of those resources. The predictive model used in developing survey strategies should be periodically reviewed and updated to reflect current knowledge in the field.

Landscape histories should be determined for the Rock Creek Flood Fan, located south of Landmark Gap Lake, and the relic drainage on the eastern side of Seven Mile Lake. Both of these geomorphic features provide evidence for different environments in the past that may have offered desirable campsites to prehistoric hunters. The Rock Creek Flood Fan may indicate both the presence of a much larger Glacier Gap Lake, and the catastrophic draining of that lake. If the Rock Creek Flood Fan can be dated, and proves to have been a Holocene event, its flood may provide a possible mechanism for having triggered the catastrophic draining of Greater Tangle Lake. The deeply incised Wildhorse Creek drainage appears to have been the former outlet of Seven Mile Lake, making the eastern end around the former outlet a desirable camping area and worthy of survey.

Public Outreach and Education

Public outreach and interpretation is very important in the Denali Highway region, especially since Denali Block I contains the TLAD, which is listed in the National Register of Historic Places. The public should be educated on the prehistory of the region, the fragility of the resources, and the laws protecting those resources. This information would increase the public's enjoyment and appreciation of the prehistory, and encourage better stewardship archaeological sites. A pamphlet OHA has in process on the cultural resources on state lands along the Denali Highway should be completed and distributed to the public at area lodges and other outlets. Work should be coordinated with DNR/DMLW, DNR/DPOR/ Interpretation and Education, and possibly BLM Interpretation, to develop and install signs interpreting the past at pullouts and trailheads. Regional public presentations should be done, describing the regional prehistory and OHA's management of the cultural resources on Denali Highway lands.

Coordination should continue with BLM and Native organizations on projects that benefit the management and interpretation of the cultural resources of the region. A small archaeological field school, possibly done in conjunction with BLM, NPS, or local Native groups, could train local people for seasonal archaeological and interpreter positions and help foster an appreciation for archaeology as a way of knowing the past. Presentations on Denali Highway archaeology and atlatl demonstrations could be done

for regional Spirit Camps, informing Native youth about the archaeological evidence of their past, and encouraging a greater appreciation of science and of their own culture.

Lastly, and possibly most importantly, OHA should continue to maintain dialogues with all parties interested in the cultural resources on Denali Highway lands.